

News Items and Public Crime Summary for Week Ending February 20, 2010

Antilles – Successful Interim Report On Forming NA Government

'Informateur' Pedro Atacho will start a next round of talks with representatives of six political parties on February 17-20, in St. Maarten; topics of discussion are a possible coalition agreement and the division of portfolios.

Atacho confirmed in his report to Governor Goedgedrag the willingness of the PAR (6); PNP (1); UPB (2); NA (3); WIPM (1); DP Statia (1) to form a 14 of 22 seat majority coalition. The LdK (5); Sovereign Party (2); DP Bonaire (1) have decided to form the opposition. (Various media)

Bonaire – Governor Annuls Constitutional Referendum

Netherlands Antilles Governor Frits Goedgedrag has annulled Bonaire's request to hold a referendum concerning their constitutional future, planned for 26 March. Goedgedrag is of the opinion that the referendum could inflict disproportionate damage to the interests of the Kingdom partners and conflicts with the International Human Rights Treaty. Also, the referendum contravenes international law by limiting the voting rights of European Dutch nationals. (Various media)

Aruba – Red Cross "Team Aruba" Returns From Mission in Haiti

The Red Cross medical 'Team Aruba' has returned from a successful Haiti mission. The team spent one week in Haiti, supported staff in 3 hospitals, performed over 70 surgeries, and treated more than 400 patients. (Various media)

St. Maarten –MP Erno Labega's Son Arrested on Drug Charges

Police arrested Erno Labega Jr, son of MP Erno Labega on suspicion of being involved in an international drug trafficking ring. U.S. authorities arrested a man with the initials B.M. on February 1, who tried to smuggle cocaine into the country. B.M. turned in a woman who consequently turned in Labega as a co-conspirator.

Also, his brother was arrested last month on suspicion of involvement in drug transshipment to the Netherlands.

It is unknown whether the suspects will go to trial in St. Maarten or in the U.S. (Daily Herald)

Antilles/Aruba – New Dutch Navy Ship Has Arrived

The Dutch Frigate Hr.Ms. Van Speijk arrived in Curacao for a six-month Caribbean tour. The ship will have a Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET) team from the U.S. Coast Guard aboard for counter-drug missions. The ship is also equipped with a Westland Lynx helicopter. (Various media)

Aruba - A Caribbean Tax Holiday for U.S. Businesses

The US government agency responsible for tax collection and tax law enforcement (IRS) is investigating how US \$100 billion a year in credit-card receipts are escaping U.S. sales and income taxes in locales like Aruba and St. Kitts.

Various tiny U.S. companies illustrate a growing trend of routing credit-card payments to Caribbean islands. At a time when the Obama Administration is preparing for a bitter battle with big multinationals over closing arcane tax loopholes, legions of mostly small retailers and service providers are minimizing their U.S. tax bills by sending credit-card receipts to Panama, Nevis, Aruba, the Cayman Islands, and other business-friendly havens. The IRS estimates that \$100 billion a year in revenue is escaping U.S. sales and income taxes in this manner.

For several years the tax agency has been formally investigating whether the spreading credit-card practice amounts to illegal behavior. Daniel Reeves, the IRS special agent leading the probe, said in April in an affidavit filed in federal court in Denver that "a number of U.S. taxpayers may be under-reporting income, evading taxes, and breaking the law" by sending card receipts offshore. Reeves declined to talk to Bloomberg Business Week, and the IRS won't provide specifics about the continuing probe.

The full story is available at:

http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/10_08/b4167046022885.htm?chan=magazine+channel_in+depth (Various media)

Aruba - Dutch Energy Envoy to Assist With Sale US-Owned Valero Refinery

The Netherlands will support Aruba in the search for a new owner for the US-owned Valero-refinery by appointing a special energy envoy, Aruban PM Mike Eman said. Special energy envoy Jan-Meinte Postma will help Aruba in the process to find a new owner for the Valero refinery and with the decision making process to possibly extract natural gas extraction from the waters surrounding the island. Venezuelan state-owned refinery PdVSA, Brazilian refinery PetroBras and China state-owned refinery PetroChina are all possible candidates to purchase the refinery, according to Eman. The interest to extract gas has increased lately after a recent discovery of a large gas field north of Venezuela, the PM said. (Amigoe)

Antilles – Six Political Parties Reach Preliminary Governing Accord

The PAR (6 seats); PNP (1); UPB (2); NA (3); WIPM (1); DP Statia (1) representing 14 of 22 parliamentary seats and all Netherlands Antilles Islands have reached a preliminary governing accord in St. Maarten, according to 'informateur' Pedro Atacho. No details were revealed, but it is expected that current Prime Minister de Jongh-Elhage will head the next NA government. (Various media)

Kingdom – Defense Insufficient to Counter Venezuelan Attack

Dutch MP Rita Verdonk is concerned about the lack of Dutch military power in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba (NA&A) to parry a possible act of aggression by Venezuelan forces. Verdonk asked the Dutch Defense Minister Eimert van Middelkoop

to analyze the threat against the NA&A by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and suggested the Dutch government increases its military powers in the Dutch Caribbean. Also, Verdonk wants to know which safety guarantees had been issued by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and/or the United States regarding the ABC islands, and if Venezuela had made security agreements with other countries such as Bolivia and Iran. (Various media)

Bonaire – Population Stands At 15.528

The Bonaire civil registry announced that the population has increased by 427 in 2009, and now stands at 15.528. (Antilliaans Dagblad)

Aruba – Ritz-Carlton Announces Plan to Open New Hotel in Aruba

Ritz-Carlton executives, together with Aruban PM Mike Eman, announced plans to open The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba, an exclusive 320-room oceanfront resort set on the island's popular Palm Beach. The new resort, scheduled to open in 2012, will feature several restaurants, an on-site spa, two swimming pools and a 24-hour casino.

Aruba is one of the most visited islands for east coast travelers. Legacy carriers including American Airlines, Continental, and Delta offer daily flights to Aruba, and the emergence of JetBlue's daily flights to Aruba have helped the island boost tourism efforts over the past year. (Various media)

Caribbean – Aruba Crowned Best Central American\Caribbean Airport

Routes (<http://www.routesonline.com/>) on Monday celebrated the first regional heat of this year's Airport Marketing Awards and announced the winners for the Americas region. Winners were chosen from three categories: North America, Central America/Caribbean and South America. While Edmonton International Airport picked up an award for best airport in North America, Aruba - Queen Beatrix International Airport scooped in the Central America/Caribbean category and Hato International Airport in Curacao received the highly commended runner-up award.

Voting for the Routes Americas Airport Marketing Awards started in mid January and was open for two weeks. During this period airlines nominated their preferred airports on Routesonline using criteria such as the airport's market research activities and marketing communications activities. The shortlisted airports then had to submit a case study to support their nominations to the judging panel. (Aruba Post)

Editorial in St. Maarten Daily Herald; Complicated Coalition Formation Process

It appears the process of forming a new Central Government was all but completed during the talks in St. Maarten in the last few days. After the six political parties from five islands involved had already agreed that the new Cabinet would work primarily on dismantling the Netherlands Antilles effective October 10, 2010, there were reports yesterday evening that the always crucial division of posts and portfolios practically had been finalized as well. In doing so, it was not possible to stick to the original desire of

primarily Prime Minister and PAR leader Emily de Jongh-Elhage to keep the cabinet small with only five ministers and no state secretaries in light of the constitutional changes.

Having three parties with one seat each in the Antillean Parliament, one party with two, one with three and one with six, it was obvious from the morning after the election that complying with her wish would be difficult at best.

That the National Alliance (NA) will have two ministers instead of its current one minister and one state secretary is logical, because the St. Maarten party went from two to three seats in Parliament. It also stands to reason that PAR of Curaçao will have four ministers with six seats, double the number of NA.

The UPB with two seats kept its current minister and state secretary, also because just one minister would have given the Bonaire party only half of what NA has in terms of posts, while it has more than half the latter's number of seats. DP-Statia, WIPM of Saba and the PNP of Curaçao each have a state secretary because they all have one seat, but this way can still be part of the Central Government team.

Important is that the Netherlands Antilles will have a new and – if all goes according to plan – last Cabinet on March 26 that is backed by 14 of the 22 seats in the Antillean Parliament. While that is still just short of the two-thirds majority needed to pass certain key legislation having to do with the forging of new relations within the Dutch Kingdom, there is a second reading possibility where only a simple majority is required.

As the dismantling process continues ahead of 10-10-10, the scope and role of the Central Government will diminish, but there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure that the transfer of tasks and means, as well as the transition of the islands into their new statuses, takes place in a smooth, orderly and responsible manner. With little more than six months in office to do it all, the ability to deal with time-pressure will be a major requirement.

CURAÇAO

Crime February 12 – 18

On February 16 a young man was shot in Santa Helena. He later died of his injuries. The motive for the shooting was not known. Less than an hour later, just after midnight, a band member was shot and killed in Otrobanda in an altercation during the Carnival parade. The suspect, allegedly a former police officer, was later arrested in St. Maarten. They were the fourth and fifth murder victims of 2010 (Amigoe, Extra, Antilliaans Dagblad, La Prensa).

ST. MAARTEN

Plans to expand police department

Island Governor Franklyn Richards announced that St. Maarten will need to have 384 police officers by 2017. The St. Maarten Police Department currently has 200 officers. The plan is to expand to just under 400 officers in phases.

Recruitment is part of a wider organizational plan for the police department which is still being discussed with Antillean and Dutch partners. Once approved, the plan will also allow for continued training by officers from the Dutch South-

Holland-South Regional Police Department (Daily Herald, St. Maarten Island Time).

"The Weekly Press Summary is a compilation of stories running in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruban press that is intended to alert readers about items of interest to them. There is no interpretation or verification of the facts contained therein."